

School sports make more safety rules to stop serious injuries or illnesses

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Foreman High School wide receiver Michael Hill lines up during an unofficial practice at Chopin Park, Chicago, Sept. 14, 2012. Photo: AP Photo/Brian Kersey

ATHENS, Ga. — More and more, schools are setting rules to keep student athletes safe.

The rules make kids stop playing when it is too hot out. They also must leave the playing field if they get hurt. The goal is to protect kids from sports injuries or illnesses. Kids can get hurt when they are pushed too hard.

Since 2009, states must make sure that kids are taken off the field if they hit their head. They want to prevent concussions, a type of brain injury.

In some states, schools must have devices that restart the heart. Each year, a few students have heart attacks while playing sports. In the South, some states have new rules to avoid heat-related illnesses. Also, schools are trying to prevent overuse injuries. These are caused by repeating the same motion over and over, like pitching a baseball.

Schools Need Trainers

Doug Casa says the rules make sense. He is with the Korey Stringer Institute. It studies ways to make sports safer.

"The most important thing you can do is have an athletic trainer on staff," Casa said.

But only four of every 10 high schools have a full-time trainer.

The Stringer Institute was named for a Minnesota Vikings football player. His name was Korey Stringer. He died of heat stroke in 2001. Heat stroke is caused when someone is out in the sun too long. His death brought attention to heat stroke in athletes.

In 2011, Ralph Sweargin was the head of the Georgia High School Association (GHSA). He knew Georgia had a problem with illnesses from heat. Between 1980 and 2011, eight Georgia high school football players died from the heat. School years in Georgia started early then. Football practices began in mid-July.

Sweargin asked scientists to do a study. He wanted them to look at how heat affects high school football players.

Go Easy When It's Hot Outside

They found that players were especially at risk for heat-related illnesses in the first days of practice. Bud Cooper helped with the study. He said it's important for players to slowly get used to hot weather.

The GHSA told schools to use a different way of measuring the heat. Schools were just looking at heat and humidity. The GHSA wanted them to also look at radiant temperature. It measures the heat on the ground. Certain surfaces, like concrete or a football field, store up heat. They make heat even worse.

For a reading above 82, all school teams now have to take breaks more often. Higher readings mean shorter practices. Also, players must wear shorts, not pants. For readings above 92, outdoor practices are stopped.

Northern states also need heat rules for all schools, Cooper said. Temperatures there are also high when football practice begins. When Stringer died in Minnesota, the temperature was over 100 degrees.

Head injuries and heat have gotten attention in high school sports. But they are not the only dangers to young athletes.

Stop Pushing Kids Too Hard

Overuse injuries also are receiving more attention. More students are playing a single sport year round. Injuries are going up. For pitchers, there are elbow and shoulder injuries. In soccer, players get knee injuries. In volleyball and swimming, it's often the shoulder.

Many schools now limit the number of pitches for baseball and softball pitchers. Some schools tell sports teams to stop training for a while. This gives kids time to recover. Many parents and coaches, though, are pushing kids to be "better, faster and stronger," said Jeffrey Dugas. He is a sports doctor in Alabama.

Mark Hyman wrote a book about the rise in youth sports injuries. More adults are becoming involved in youth sports. It is causing more kids to get hurt, Hyman said. Before, when kids got hurt, they stopped playing, he said. Now, parents and coaches push them too far, he said.

For injuries to go down, adults have to change, he said.

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] that suggests that the kids are being overworked by coaches and parents.
- 2 Which sentence suggests one way some schools might lower the number of student sports injuries?
 - (A) Doug Casa says the rules make sense.
 - (B) He wanted them to look at how heat affects high school football players.
 - (C) But only four of every 10 high schools have a full-time trainer.
 - (D) In 2011, Ralph Sweargin was the head of the Georgia High School Association (GHSA).
- 3 Which option BEST describes the section “Go Easy When It’s Hot Outside”?
 - (A) order of events
 - (B) before and after comparison
 - (C) causes and effects
 - (D) solutions to problems
- 4 What would make another good title for the section “Stop Pushing Kids Too Hard”?
 - (A) “More Stories Of Youth Sports Injuries”
 - (B) “More Causes Of Youth Sports Injuries”
 - (C) “More Experts Speak About Youth Sports Injuries”
 - (D) “More Solutions To Youth Sports Injuries”

Answer Key

- 1 Select the paragraph from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] that suggests that the kids are being overworked by coaches and parents.

Paragraph 1:

The rules make kids stop playing when it is too hot out. They also must leave the playing field if they get hurt. The goal is to protect kids from sports injuries or illnesses. Kids can get hurt when they are pushed too hard.

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(C) But only four of every 10 high schools have a full-time trainer.

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